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A CORRELATIONAL STUDY ON PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' SCHOOL READINESS AND ADAPTATION PROBLEMS¹

Research article

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between school readiness and adaptation problems of primary school first-grade students in the 2017-2018 academic year. In this study, correlational survey model was used. The sample of the study consists of 909 primary school students studying in İstanbul, Kayseri, Gaziantep and Van provinces determined by stratified purposeful sampling method. "Primary School Readiness Scale" and "Adaptation to School Scale" were used as data collection instruments. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and stepwise regression analysis were used to analyze the data. The results indicated that a high level, a negative and significant relationship existed between school readiness and adaptation problems of primary school students. It was determined that primary school students' readiness concerning affective skills (54.4%), psychomotor skills (4.4%) and cognitive skills (0.5%) accounted for 59.3% of the variance in school adaptation problems of primary school students. It was concluded that students' readiness for self-care skills did not contribute significantly to the variance in school adaptation problems. To this connection, it may be advisable to carry out activities such as collaborative learning, drama, role-play and group work to increase students' affective readiness level, especially in the pre-school education period.

Keywords: School readiness, school adaptation problems, primary school students

1. Introduction

Primary school is an important turning point in a child's educational life. The child, who starts primary school, establishes relations with the social environment and socializes in this way. Primary school, which is different from the family environment for the child, is a period in which basic knowledge and skills are acquired. Therefore, primary school is critical for a child's learning life (Kırca, 2007). Primary school is an important level of education for children to adapt to the cultural values and rules of society (Çubukçu & Gültekin, 2006). Primary school is the first stage in the formal education process. For this reason, the children starting primary school are faced with performing the first scheduled education activities. Students face tasks such as learning subjects within a curriculum, follow the rules and teacher's instructions, and more importantly learn the basic skills of reading, writing, basic numerical skills and so on (Oktay & Unutkan, 2003). Therefore, children who leave their

families for the first time during primary school are likely to experience adaptation problems in the face of new situations and tasks in the school environment.

Individuals' reactions to new environments bring about the adaptation problem. Yavuzer (2014) defined the adaptation problem as emotional disorders that arise as a result of the difficulties caused by the environment and the developmental stages of the individual. The problem of adaptation can be seen in many areas as well as in the school environment, which includes the adaptation of new children to the school environment. While Birch and Ladd (1997) correlated school adaptation with the concepts of school success, social interaction, interest and comfort; Ladd, Birch and Buhs (1999) described school adaptation as a concept that includes positive attitudes of students about classroom and school environment, and successful interactions with friends and teachers in the classroom and extracurricular activities. On the other hand, Kim, Kwon and Han (2015) considered school adaptation as being compatible with the stimuli from the environment in the school and the relationships with other people. In this case, school adaptation can be considered as the ability of the child to react and adapt to the environment, individuals and the situations he/she encounters in school.

In order to fulfill the duties and responsibilities of the school, it is important that students adapt effectively to the school. Therefore, the child's adaptation to school is very important. Starting and adapting to school is one of the most serious challenges faced by children in the primary school period (Gill, Winters & Friedman, 2006). This adaptation process is directly related to the child's readiness for school, the support of their parents, and the educational understanding of teachers and school administrators (Altunkaymak & Akman, 2016; İnal, 2012). As mentioned above, the adaptation of children to school, especially at the beginning of primary school, is crucial for their academic achievement, social and emotional behaviors, and it also affects students' future learning and life processes. In addition to social and environmental factors, individual factors such as cognitive, affective and psychomotor developmental characteristics of children also influence the school adaptation process which is of such importance in children's life.

One of the most crucial factors influencing the adaptation of primary school first-grade students and their academic success is their readiness level. Successful exhibition of the skills and behaviors expected from the child in primary school is directly related to school readiness. School readiness includes cognitive, affective, psychomotor and self-care skills. The child should be ready for school cognitively, physically and socially (Güler, 2001). Different researchers have made various definitions of school readiness. Pianta, Cox and Snow (2007) described school readiness as having sufficient knowledge and skills necessary to achieve success in school, while Edwards (1999) referred to school readiness as being suitable for achieving the goals set by the school. Similarly, Rafoth, Buchenauer, Crissman, and Halko (2004) described school readiness as the level of the child's cognitive, behavioral and emotional ability to successfully perform school learning. In this case, school readiness can be defined as having sufficient knowledge, skills or attitudes for the child to achieve the objectives required by the school.

The success of the children in the school environment will be possible only if they are at the level of readiness to achieve the school's achievements. The success of children in primary school will have a positive effect on future educational steps, as well as creating a positive self-perception, gaining self-confidence and self-efficacy. The child is struggling with many problems by himself/herself in the school where he/she separates from his/her family. The ability of the child to overcome these problems is directly related to his/her readiness to struggle. It is generally stated that every child can reach school readiness at the

age of six years. However, school readiness may vary due to individual differences. Although the developmental steps are the same for all children in all areas, some children may have access to these steps more slowly or faster than others. In this case, it would be wrong to consider only the age as a criterion for starting school. Therefore, various tests are applied to decide children's readiness to start school (Snow, 2006), different programs are conducted to prepare the child for school, facilitate adaptation and importance is given to cognitive, emotional, physical, social readiness of the child (Erkan & Kırca, 2010).

School readiness is not a numerical value and is too versatile not to be reduced to a single criterion. Cognitive, language, social-emotional and psychomotor development are the criteria that makeup school readiness. All these areas of development should be mature enough to demonstrate primary school skills and behaviors. The development of child's skills such as walking, running, jumping, bouncing on one leg, cutting with scissors, drawing pictures and letters, playing with friends, waiting for their order, listening, distinguishing sounds, distinguishing similarities and differences, understanding many concepts, matching, sorting, classification, etc. and development of attention span prepare the child for school. School readiness and adaptation are two complementary concepts in terms of meeting the qualifications of the curriculum implemented in schools. In this respect, it is very essential for children to be ready for school in terms of cognitive, affective, social and psychomotor skills as well as adapt to the school environment.

In the literature, there are studies determining the school readiness/maturity levels and school adaptation of primary school students (Baker, 2006; Canbulut, 2017; Ercan & Kırca, 2010; Lau, Li & Rao, 2011; Özarslan, 2014; Polat et al., 2014; Uzun, 2015; Yüce, 2016), but the studies to determine the relationship and predictive power between school readiness and school adaptation problems are quite limited. Studies conducted in Turkey are mostly descriptive. On the other hand, school readiness was associated with the variables such as parent involvement in studies conducted abroad (Lau, Li & Rao, 2011), teacher-student relationship (Baker, 2006) etc. Although there are two studies conducted in Turkey (Canbulut, 2017; Polat et al, 2014) examining the relationship between school adaptation and school readiness, these studies are only limited to students studying in one province. Child adaptation to school can be affected by many elements such as socio-emotional, academic, behavioral and cognitive competences (McIntyre, Blacher & Baker, 2006). Therefore, comprehensive studies are needed to determine the relationship between school readiness and adaptation problems that may have an impact on the school success of first-grade students in primary school.

The aim of this study is to analyze the relationship between school readiness and adaptation problems of primary school first-grade students in 2017-2018 academic year. For this aim, the following questions are addressed:

1. Is there a significant relationship between primary school students' readiness levels and school adaptation problems?
2. Do primary school students' readiness levels predict their school adaptation problems significantly?

This study differs from similar studies in the literature in terms of sampling primary school first-grade students from different provinces in Turkey and thus generalizability of this study is considered to be high. This study is important in terms of determining the relationship between primary school first-grade students' readiness and adaptation problems. In addition, this study is expected to provide data for future studies concerning model testing on determining the variables causing school adaptation problems.

2. Method

2.1. Research Model

In this study, correlational survey model was used. The correlational survey model aims to investigate the relationships between multiple variables and the level of these relationships (Karasar, 2015). The correlational survey model is considered to be appropriate for this study as it is aimed to analyze the relationship between school readiness and adaptation problems of primary school students.

2.2. Population and Sample

The study population includes the students who started primary school in public schools of Istanbul, Kayseri, Gaziantep, and Van in 2017-2018 academic year. According to data obtained from Ministry of National Education Strategy Development Presidency (2018), 313.433 primary school first-grade students are enrolled in public schools of Istanbul (214.834 students), Kayseri (22.328 students), Gaziantep (51.696 students) and Van (24.575 students).

A purposeful sampling method was used in this study. Purposeful sampling allows in-depth analysis of situations that can best represent the population and offer rich data (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz & Demirel, 2016). The researcher chooses the sample that will best serve the purpose of the study (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). From this point, in this study, the stratified purposeful sampling method was used. In a stratified purposeful sampling method; the population is separated into strata, the sample is selected from the strata to reflect the characteristics of the population and to make comparisons. The main element that distinguishes this method from random stratified sampling is that randomness is not considered in the selection of units for sampling (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016; Patton, 2002).

In this study, when strata were determined, samples were taken from provinces in different socio-economic development levels on the grounds that the socio-economic development level of the provinces could affect the readiness and adaptation problems of the students. Accordingly, results of the report "Socio-Economic Development Ranking Survey of Provinces and Regions" published by Ministry of Development in 2013 were taken into consideration. According to this report; 81 provinces were classified into four strata as high, medium-high, medium-low and low socio-economic development level (Ministry of Development, 2013). Therefore, four provinces were determined to represent each stratum: Istanbul at high socio-economic development level, Kayseri at medium-high socio-economic development level, Gaziantep at medium-low socio-economic development level, Van at low-socio-economic development level. In these provinces, 909 students were included in the sample who started primary school in 2017-2018 academic year. The personal characteristics of primary school students in the sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Personal characteristics of primary school students in the sample*

Characteristics	Category	Number (N)
Gender	Female	474
	Male	435
Province	İstanbul	216
	Kayseri	206
	Gaziantep	235
	Van	252
Total		909

As seen in Table 1, 474 of the students are female and 435 of them are male. 216 of the students are studying in Istanbul, 206 in Kayseri, 235 in Gaziantep and 252 in Van. According to Çıngı (1994), if the number of population is 500.000 at “.01” significance level, sample size of “665” is considered sufficient to represent the population (Cited in Büyüköztürk et al., 2016). In this case, it can be said that the sample of this study is large enough to represent the population.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

2.3.1. Primary school readiness scale: Canbulut and Kırıktas (2016) developed the scale to determine school readiness levels of primary school students. The scale, which is scored by primary school teacher, consists of 33 items in 5-point Likert type. As a result of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) conducted to ensure the scale's construct validity, the scale was determined as four sub-dimensions: cognitive skills, affective skills, self-care skills and psychomotor skills. Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found as 0.98 in sub-dimension of cognitive skills, 0.97 in affective skills, 0.96 in self-care skills and 0.96 in psychomotor skills (Canbulut & Kırıktas, 2016). In this study, it was found as 0.98, 0.96, 0.94 and 0.96 for above-mentioned sub-dimensions, respectively. In this case, it can be said that the data obtained from the scale is highly reliable (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016).

2.3.2. School adaptation scale: Özarslan (2014) developed the scale to specify school adaptation problems of primary school students. The scale, which is scored by the primary school teacher, consists of 15 items in 5-point Likert type. According to the results of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), it was concluded that the scale is one-dimensional. The Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficients of the scale were calculated as 0.92 and 0.90 for 60-71 months and 72-84 months old children (Özarslan, 2014). Cronbach Alpha value for the total scale was found as 0.95 in this study. Accordingly, the data obtained from the scale can be said to be reliable (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016).

2.4. Data Analysis

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients (r) were used to analyze the relationship between students' school readiness and school adaptation problems. These scores were interpreted as low between “0.00-0.29”, medium between “0.30-0.69” and high level between “0.70-1.00” (Büyüköztürk, 2012). Stepwise regression analysis was used to specify to what extent students' school readiness levels predict their school adaptation problems in which independent variables having a significant effect on the dependent variable are included in the analysis in the order of importance (Cohen, Cohen, West and Aiken, 2003). Assumptions of stepwise regression were tested before the analysis in terms of linearity, univariate and multivariate normality, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrix and multicollinearity problem (Büyüköztürk, 2012; Pallant, 2005).

For univariate normality, skewness/kurtosis values of dependent variables and histogram graphs were examined. Accordingly, it was found that the skewness values of the dependent variables on school readiness scale ranged between 0.566 and -0.985, and kurtosis values ranged between -0.332 and -0.597; it was found that skewness value was 0.922 and kurtosis value was 0.112 in school adaptation scale. In this case, it was concluded that the skewness and kurtosis coefficients of the dependent variables were in the range of ± 1 and the data showed normal distribution according to histogram graphs (Büyüköztürk, 2012). Levene's Test and Box's M results were examined for homogeneity of variances and distribution of covariance matrices. Accordingly, it was concluded that the results were not statistically significant ($p > .05$) and therefore the assumptions of homogeneity of variance-covariance

matrices were achieved (Büyüköztürk, 2012). For multivariate normality, Mahalanobis distance values were calculated and the extreme values were excluded from the data set before analysis. The linearity between the dependent variables was examined by scatter plots and it was found that the linearity assumption regarding the sub-dimensions of the scales was achieved. In addition, it was calculated that there was a medium and high level of relationships between dependent variables, and the highest correlation between variables was "-.762". In this case, it was concluded that multivariate normality and linearity are achieved and there is no multicollinearity problem between dependent variables.

3. Results

Table 2 shows the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients calculated to examine the relationship between students' school adaptation problems and school readiness levels.

Table 2. *Pearson product moments correlation coefficients for school adaptation problems and school readiness*

<i>Scales and sub-dimensions</i>	<i>School Readiness Scale (total)</i>	<i>Cognitive Skills</i>	<i>Affective Skills</i>	<i>Psychomotor Skills</i>	<i>Self-Care Skills</i>
<i>School Adaptation Problems</i>	-.762**	-.733**	-.737**	-.708**	-.651**
<i>p<.05 *, p<.01**</i>					

As seen in Table 2, there is a high level, negative and significant relationship between primary school first grade students' adaptation problems and school readiness levels ($r = -.762$; $p < .01$). Similarly, there is a high level, negative and significant relationship between students' adaptation problems and school readiness scale's sub-dimensions of cognitive skills ($r = -.733$; $p < .01$), affective skills ($r = -.737$; $p < .01$), psychomotor skills ($r = -.708$; $p < .01$); while there is a medium level, negative and significant relationship between students' adaptation problems and self-care skills ($r = -.651$; $p < .01$).

Stepwise regression analysis results concerning the prediction of students' school adaptation problems with school readiness are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Stepwise regression analysis results concerning the prediction of students' school adaptation problems with school readiness*

<i>Steps</i>	<i>Predictive Variables</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>Predictive Power (R)</i>	<i>Explained Variance (R²)</i>
1	Affective Skills	-.737	.737	.544
2	Psychomotor Skills	-.337	.767	.588
3	Cognitive Skills	-.188	.770	.593

As seen in Table 3, it was found that students' school readiness concerning affective, psychomotor and cognitive skills can explain 59.3% of the variance in school adaptation problems. ANOVA results for the stepwise regression analysis in Table 3 are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. ANOVA results concerning the prediction of students' school adaptation problems with school readiness

<i>Model</i>	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean of Squares</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Regression	427.005	3	142.352	440.090	.000
Residual	292.731	905	.323		

According to the findings in Table 4, the predictive power of the stepwise regression analysis shown in Table 3 is significant ($F(3, 905) = 440.090, p < .000$). The regression analysis was carried out in three steps. It was found that three variables are important predictors in terms of their contribution to the variance concerning students' school adaptation problems. In the first step; "affective skills" explaining 54.4% of the variance was included in the analysis. In the second step, "psychomotor skills" contributing 4.4% to the explained variance was included. In the third step, "cognitive skills" contributing 0.5% to the explained variance was included. These analysis results show that the three variables together that are included in the regression equation as important predictors can explain more than half (59.3%) of the variance concerning students' school adaptation problems. When the signs of regression coefficients are examined, it is seen that there is a negative relationship between all three variables and students' adaptation problems. In this case, it is seen that "affective skills", "psychomotor skills" and "cognitive skills" are important predictors of students' school adaptation problems in the order of importance. On the other hand, it was found that "self-care skills" did not contribute significantly to the total variance; in other words, it did not predict school adaptation problems significantly.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In this study aiming to analyze the relationship between school readiness and adaptation problems of first-grade students in primary school, it was concluded that there is a high level, negative and significant relationship between primary school first-grade students' school readiness and school adaptation problems. Accordingly; a high level, negative and significant relationship was found between students' adaptation problems and school readiness scale's sub-dimensions of cognitive skills, affective skills, psychomotor skills; a medium level, negative and significant relationship was concluded between students' adaptation problems and self-care skills. These results support the literature. In parallel with the results of this study, Canbulut (2017) found that there is a medium level, positive and significant relationship between primary school first grade students' school adaptation and school readiness. Similarly, Polat et al. (2014) concluded that school readiness is an important factor in school adaptation. In their study, it was found that increased school readiness positively affected school adaptation. In the study conducted by Yüce (2016), teachers associated school readiness with school adaptation. Uzun (2015) stated that the school readiness of children affects their general development and adaptation level, and they are all influenced by each other. Based on the results of similar studies in the literature and this study's results, it can be said that there is a strong relationship between school adaptation and school readiness. Accordingly, it can be concluded that as school readiness of first-grade students decreases, school adaptation problems increase. It is seen that there is a strong relationship between school adaptation and readiness concerning cognitive, affective, psychomotor skills, while there is a medium level relationship between school adaptation and readiness concerning self-care skills. Considering that students mostly use these skills in the classroom, a significant relationship between these skills and school adaptation problems can be considered as an expected result. When students are ready concerning cognitive and psychomotor skills, they

face fewer problems in achievement of their initial literacy gains and adaption to the school. It can be said that the students, who are affectively ready for school, can adapt to the school, friends and teachers in a shorter time. In addition, it can be put forward that the students, who have self-care skills, can meet their needs without getting help and thus the adaptation problems are more likely to decrease.

In addition, it was concluded that school readiness of first-grade primary school students concerning affective, cognitive and psychomotor skills explained 59.3% of the variance in students' school adaptation problems. Accordingly; readiness for affective skills explained 54.4% of the variance, readiness for psychomotor skills explained 4.4% of the variance, readiness for cognitive skills explained 0.5% of the variance in school adaptation problems; while readiness for self-care skills did not contribute significantly to the variance in students' school adaptation problems. When the levels of prediction concerning school adaptation problems are examined, it is seen that readiness for affective skills comes first and explains more than half of school adaptation problems alone. In this case, it can be said that readiness for affective skills is an important predictor of school adaptation problems. It can be said that readiness for psychomotor skills in second-order and readiness for cognitive skills in third-order are significant predictors of school adaptation problems, while readiness for self-care skills is not a significant variable in predicting school adaptation problems. These results coincide with the results of similar studies in the literature.

According to the results of this study, it can be said that school readiness is a strong predictor of school adaptation problems. In parallel with the results of this study; Kagan, Moore and Bredekamp (1995) and Carol (2000) defined “social and emotional development” as one of the five dimensions explaining child’s readiness. Furthermore, they explained social development with the child's social interaction and school adaptation. Uzun (2015) associated the child’s school adaptation, being able to perform the duties and responsibilities of the school, learning the basic skills, academic knowledge with school readiness. In their study, Polat et al. (2014) found that students who are ready for school adapt to school more quickly. Similarly, Boz and Yıldırım (2014) concluded that 60-65 months old students were not cognitively ready for school, thus these children had adaptation problems and failed academically. According to Başar (1999), one of the reasons for not adapting to school is the low level of readiness. Özarslan (2014) stated that adaptation problems can be seen frequently in children who are not ready for school. Based on the results of similar studies in the literature and the results of this study, it is seen that there is a strong cause-effect relationship between school readiness and school adaptation problems. This result is consistent with the relevant theoretical literature. McIntyre, Blacher and Baker (2006) stated that adaptation to school can be affected by many factors such as academic, social, emotional, behavioral and cognitive competences. Similarly, Neuenschwander et al. (2012) emphasized that an effective school adaptation process is influenced by variables such as school readiness as well as motivation, participation, teacher-student relationship, etc. In this case, it can be said that one of the most important reasons for primary school first-grade students' having school adaptation problems is the level of school readiness.

It is seen that readiness for affective skills comes to the forefront in predicting school adaptation problems and is a more powerful predictor than other skills. Parallel to the results of this study, scientific studies in the literature point to the critical role of social and emotional readiness in an effective school adaptation process (Blair, 2003; Raver & Knitzer, 2002). Affectively ready students for school are the ones who do not hesitate to take responsibility, finish the work they have started, behave appropriately in society, comply with the rules, establish strong relationships with their friends, communicate strongly with their environment, and use course materials orderly (Canbulut & Kırıktas, 2016). The child faces a

new environment by starting to primary school. Being a new environment for the child, adaptation to the school depends on his ability to interact with the people around him, establish positive relations with his friends and follow the rules of the school. These students will not have problems adapting to school such as requesting family members, crying in class, shyness, not able to communicate, etc. However, the school brings certain duties and responsibilities to the student. The student's not hesitating to undertake these duties and responsibilities and striving to fulfill these responsibilities will make him/ her self-confident and have self-efficacy at school. Affectively ready children will face school adaptation problems less such as refusing the school, making excuses for not going to school, constantly waiting for help from the teacher, being indifferent to school and lesson, refusing to participate in activities, showing infantile behaviors that are not suitable for his/her age, lack of perception of school and lessons because of the fact that they do not hesitate to fulfill the duties and responsibilities of the school. In this case, considering that social-emotional problems are the basis of school adaptation problems, readiness for affective skills' being the most important predictor can be considered as an expected result.

It can be said that psychomotor readiness facilitates school adaptation. Students who are ready for school concerning psychomotor skills will be able to do the activities easily such as writing, holding pencil, painting, cutting and pasting. As small muscle skills are developed sufficiently in these students, there will be no problems of school adaptation such as rapid fatigue and constant waiting for help from the teacher. Therefore, it will be easier for these students to adapt to the school. Cognitive readiness is also a significant predictor of school adaptation even if it is at low level. Accordingly, the students, who have the skills sufficiently that the school expects from the child cognitively such as understanding the relationships and stimuli between the events, knowing the basic geometric concepts, matching objects, grouping and sorting, etc., will experience school adaptation problems less such as refusing to participate in school activities, constantly waiting for help from the teacher, lack of school and lesson perception, etc.

On the other hand, it was found that self-care skills did not significantly predict school adaptation problems. Before starting school, the child receives most of the self-care education in the family. Although the child cannot fulfill his/her self-care skills due to the education he/she receives from the family and age, there may be a lack of fear, because our society may not refer to children of this age to fulfill self-care skills alone such as feeding, cleaning, taking on/off clothes. Therefore, the failure of the child to perform his/her self-care skills may not be considered as an abnormal condition for him/her. Then, children will not feel contradictory or insufficient because of the fact that they cannot fulfill their self-care skills. The student may get the idea that I can't because I'm a child. Therefore, it can be said that readiness for self-care skills is not a significant variable in terms of school adaptation problems.

5. Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, it is seen that readiness for affective skills is a stronger predictor of predicting school adaptation problems than other skills. In this case, it may be suggested to carry out activities such as cooperative learning, drama, role playing, group work and speech ring in pre-school education and school adaptation programs, especially to increase affective readiness. Considering the relationship between school readiness and school adaptation, it may be suggested to prepare effective adaptation education programs for primary school first grade students. Similarly, it can be suggested to prepare action plans for the elimination of deficiencies on determining the readiness levels of students starting primary school by applying maturity/readiness tests. This study is limited to the relationship

and prediction between school readiness and school adaptation, future studies can be conducted using structural equation modeling to identify variables that cause school adaptation problems.

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